The Whistler (radio series)

The Whistler is an American radio mystery drama which ran from May 16, 1942, until September 22, 1955, on the west-coast regional CBS radio network. The show was also broadcast in Chicago and over Armed Forces Radio. On the west coast, it was sponsored by the Signal Oil Company: "That whistle is your signal for the Signal Oil program, *The Whistler*." There were also

two short-lived attempts to form east-coast broadcast spurs: July 3 to September 25, 1946, sponsored by the Campbell Soup Company; and March 26, 1947, to September 29, 1948, sponsored by Household Finance. The program was also adapted into a film noir series by Columbia Pictures in 1944.

Characters and story

I...am the
Whistler,
and I know
many
things, for I
walk by
night. I
know many
strange
tales, many
secrets
hidden in
the hearts
of men and
women who
have

stepped into
the
shadows.
Yes... I
know the
nameless
terrors of
which they
dare not
speak!

One
opening to
The Whistler

Each episode of *The Whistler* began with the sound of footsteps and a person whistling.[1] (*The Saint* radio series with

Vincent Price used a similar opening.) The haunting signature theme tune was composed by Wilbur Hatch and featured Dorothy Roberts whistling with an orchestra.[2]

A character known only as the Whistler was the host and narrator of the tales, which focused on crime and fate. He often commented directly upon the action in the manner of a Greek chorus, taunting the characters, guilty or innocent, from an omniscient perspective. The stories followed a formula in which a person's criminal acts were typically revealed either by an overlooked but important detail or by

the criminal's own stupidity. An ironic ending, often grim, was a key feature of each episode. But on rare occasions, such as "Christmas Bonus" broadcast on Christmas Day 1944, the plot's twist of fate caused the story to end happily for the protagonist.

Bill Forman, a veteran radio announcer, had the title role of the Whistler for the longest period of time. Others who portrayed the Whistler at various times were Gale Gordon, Joseph Kearns, Marvin Miller (announcer for the show, who occasionally filled in for Forman and played supporting roles), and Bill

Johnstone (who had the title role on radio's *The Shadow* from 1938 to 1943). Cast members included Betty Lou Gerson, Hans Conried,[1] Joseph Kearns,[1] Cathy Lewis,[3] Elliott Lewis,[1] Gerald Mohr,[1] Lurene Tuttle[1] and Jack Webb.[4]

Writer-producer J. Donald Wilson established the tone of the show during its first two years, and he was followed in 1944 by producer-director George Allen. Other directors included Sterling Tracy and Sherman Marks with final scripts by Joel Malone and Harold Swanton. Of the 692 episodes, over 200 no longer exist. In 1946, a local Chicago version of *The*

Whistler with local actors (including Everett Clarke as the Whistler) aired Sundays on WBBM, sponsored by Meister Brau beer.

Films and television

Films

The Whistler was adapted into a film noir series of eight films by Columbia Pictures.[5] The "Voice of the Whistler" was provided by an uncredited Otto Forrest. In the first seven films, veteran actor Richard Dix played the main character in the story – a different character in each film. In the eighth film, made after Dix's

retirement, Michael Duane played the main character.

- *The Whistler* – 1944, directed by William Castle
- *The Mark of the Whistler* – 1944, directed by William Castle
- *The Power of the Whistler* – 1945, directed by Lew Landers
- *Voice of the Whistler* – 1945, directed by William Castle
- *Mysterious Intruder* – 1946, directed by William Castle
- *The Secret of the Whistler* – 1946, directed by George Sherman

- *The Thirteenth Hour* – 1947, directed by William Clemens
- *The Return of the Whistler* – 1948, directed by D. Ross Lederman

Television

A syndicated TV version of *The Whistler* was produced and aired for a brief period in 1954. Bill Forman, the most frequently employed radio voice of the show's title character, reprised that role on TV.[6]

Cultural references

On April 21, 1964, the show was parodied on an episode of *The Jack Benny Program*

entitled "I Am the Fiddler,"[7][8] an expanded reboot of an earlier, like-named, audio-only Benny parody, which aired during the October 20, 1946 episode of his radio show.[9]

In the 1990 film *The Two Jakes*, set in Los Angeles in the late 1940s, the opening narrative of *The Whistler* can be heard on the car radio as private detective J.J. Gittes (played by Jack Nicholson) cruises the streets.

See also

- Audio theatre
- *The Mysterious Traveler*

- Old-time radio

References

1. *Dunning (1998), 719–720. (https://archive.org/details/onairencyclop00dunn/page/718/mode/2up)*
2. *Van Neste, Dan (Autumn 2011). "I ... am ... the Whistler!!". Nostalgia Digest. Vol. 37, no. 4. pp. 20–24.*
3. *Dunning (1998), 513.*
4. *Dunning (1998), 209.*
5. *Selby, Spencer. Dark City: The Film Noir, the Whistler film series described and covered as film noir on p. 203. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland Publishing, 1984. ISBN 0-89950-103-6.*

6. *"Video-Radio Briefs: Whistler Invades TV Scene Tonight" (https://www.newspapers.com/image/385834562/?clipping_id=53397334) . The Los Angeles Times. October 15, 1954. p. 26. Retrieved April 11, 2023.*
7. *"Television – The Stations Recommend: Tuesday, April 21" (https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/cgi-bin/crra?a=d&d=cher19640416-01.1.17&e=-------en-20--1--txt-txIN-%22jack+benny+program%22+whistler+fiddler------) . The Clarion Herald. April 16, 1964. p. 5. Retrieved April 11, 2023.*
8. *Library of Congress (1971). Motion Pictures, 1960–1969 (https://archive.org/details/Motionpict19601969librrich0013/page/284/mode/2up?q=%22the+fiddler%22) . U.S. Copyright Office. p. 284.*

9. *Old Time Radio Researchers (January 7, 2018). "Jack Benny – JB 1946-10-20 The Fiddler – Parody Of The Whistler" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBy7r0gNlqU&t=1027s) . YouTube.*

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External links

- *The Whistler* (http://www.otr.net/?p=whis) at the OTR Network Library (79 radio

episodes)

- *The Whistler* (https://archive.org/details/The_Whistler_508_Episodes) at the Internet Archive (450 radio episodes)

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